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SUBJECT: REGIONAL/MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: APATHY, LOCALISM
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Summary:

¶1. (SBU) Regional and municipal elections have failed to spark much enthusiasm in the key southern regions of Arequipa and Ayacucho, where voters appear stricken with "election fatigue." A plethora of local movements and candidates pursuing often narrow regional and local platforms predominates, fragmenting the political landscape. Neither Ollanta Humala's Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP) nor the governing APRA party are likely to do well in the upcoming races, with Humala's prospects in his former southern strongholds particularly dim. While democratic participation should be high, a multitude of local leaders representing diverse groups and elected with narrow pluralities could complicate governance. End Summary.

Election Fatigue Dogs Voters

¶2. (SBU) Voters in the key southern regions of Arequipa and Ayacucho are stricken with the nationwide phenomenon of "election fatigue," following general elections in April and the critical presidential run-off in June, according to a variety of local observers interviewed by Poloffs during November visits to both areas. For this reason, although campaigns have entered the final phase and colorful candidate posters line the streets of the two provincial capitals, an air of mild indifference regarding the upcoming vote is palpable.

¶3. (SBU) Som of this quiescence has to do with the perceived low nationwide stakes of the regional and municipal balloting. Local candidates and local political movements pursuing often narrowly local platforms predominate, which tends to underscore the geographically limited consequences of the vote. While some, including the likely winner of the Arequipa regional presidency Manuel Guillen and many candidates in Ayacucho, have radical political affiliations, the provincial focus of the debate tends to level ideological differences. That is, when they talk about the issues that move local voters -- better roads, water, sewage, jobs, etc. -- most candidates sound about the same.

¶4. (SBU) Moreover, party or group affiliation is in most cases decidedly secondary to the merits or electoral

prospects of the individual candidates. In Arequipa, the PNP candidate for mayor is a former Fujimorista with strong local name recognition and a good track record at the municipal level. In Ayacucho, Clelia de Verbist of the pro-business NGO Center for Competitiveness told Poloff that nine organizations had asked her to be their candidate for Regional President, including one with connections to Sendero Luminoso. She declined, noting that these requests reflected the shortage of credible local leaders and the willingness of power-seeking groups to sign on anyone with name-recognition.

Neither Ollanta Nor APRA

15. (SBU) While both Arequipa and Ayacucho awarded pro-Chavez radical candidate Ollanta Humala overwhelming landslides this past June (64 percent and 83 percent respectively), support for Humala's Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP) appears to have evaporated in both these areas since that time. For one, the UPP and PNP are each fielding separate candidates in both regions. Other leftist groups that had coalesced around Humala in the national elections are also running their own candidates. That Humala tried to found a new movement in addition to his PNP party has further undermined his electoral prospects (Ref A). Most observers agree that Humala is not a factor in these elections, and to the extent that his party wins in either region it will be thanks to the candidates' track record and standing in the community, not for his or her ideological affinity or political connection with the radical almost-president.

16. (SBU) APRA will likely be swamped by similar local and regional tides. In Ayacucho, Garcia's party leads narrowly in the race for the regional presidency, with incumbent Omar Quesada, but elsewhere the party is not poised to do well. In Arequipa, the incumbent regional president who represents APRA is running a distant third in polls, and the incumbent APRA mayor is not running at all (thanks to a party injunction). Many observers believe President Garcia does not mind the prospect of working with non-APRA regional and local leaders, and some suspect he would prefer to do so for several reasons: he can blame inevitable local and regional governance problems on non-APRA groups; he can successfully co-opt local leaders with national government favors and support; and he can maintain his position as the party's sole center of gravity.

Too Much Democracy?

17. (SBU) Rules that make it easy for groups to launch candidacies -- candidates for regional president need the signatures of just 1 percent of the voters in the previous election; candidates for district mayorships require only 500 signatures -- have unleashed a wide and diverse array of competitors on the electorate. But they have also facilitated a blistering fragmentation of representation in both regions, where many voters have trouble recognizing who is who and what the multiple different candidates represent. This could make effective governance difficult, since it virtually guarantees that eventual winners will neither garner majorities, and at times win with threadbare pluralities, nor enjoy solid governing mandates.
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